

Writing Sumerian, Creating Texts: Reflections on Text-building Practices in Old Babylonian Schools

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Abstract

Sumerian lexical and literary compositions both emerged from the same social sphere, namely scribal education. The complexities of inter-compositional dependence in these two corpora have not been thoroughly explored, particularly as relevant to questions of text-building during the Old Babylonian period (c. 1800–1600 BCE). Copying practices evident in lexical texts indicate that students and scholars adopted various methods of replication, including visual copying, copying from memory, and ad hoc innovation. They were not confined to reproducing a received text. Such practices extend to copying literary compositions. A study of compositions from Advanced Lexical Education in comparison with several literary compositions shows a complex inter-dialectic between the corpora, in which lexical compositions demonstrate dependence on literary compositions and vice versa. Thus, Old Babylonian students and scholars could experiment with multiple text-building practices, drawing on their knowledge of the lexical and the literary, regularly creating new versions of familiar compositions.

Keywords

Sumerian literature – lexical texts – Old Babylonian education – scribal practices – text-building

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1 Introduction

Two aspects require our attention when examining ancient Near Eastern text-building practices. The first is how texts were copied and transmitted. The second is how compositions were compiled and/or redacted. Old Babylonian (c. 1800–1600 BCE, henceforth OB) Sumerian curricular texts provide opportunities to observe both processes. As demonstrated over the past twenty years, the compositions used in scribal schools, particularly at the city of Nippur, comprised a basic curriculum, used primarily to teach scribal students the cuneiform writing system and the Sumerian language.¹

What follows are my observations with implications for how OB scribes interacted with Sumerian compositions. Methods for reproducing compositions were not homogenous, but differed based, in part, on curricular phase. In addition, some series of lexical compositions seem to draw directly from literary compositions and some literary compositions seem to depend on particular lexical lists. At issue is the nature of intertextuality and dependence in OB Sumerian lexical and literary compositions. I suggest that the lexical and the literary interact in a mutual dialectic, being regularly reinvented by student scribes and scholars who are familiar with both corpora and use that knowledge to influence their versions of these compositions.

I first discuss some preliminaries and introduce the OB curriculum and relevant scribal practices. Secondly, I look at text-reproduction in the early stage of scribal education, particularly the copying, transmission, and innovation of advanced lexical lists. Finally, I discuss a type of dialectic between some lexical and literary compositions wherein we might detect a degree of mutual dependence in how these compositions were constructed.

2 Text-building in Old Babylonian Schools

The narrative of the OB scribal curriculum has been a focal point in other text-building discussions, namely P. Delnero's (2012a, b) work on the role of memorization in the reproduction of Sumerian literary compositions and as an empirical comparison in K. van der Toorn's (2007) and D. Carr's (2005, 2011) discussions of Judaite practices of composition and transmission. The basic

1 Throughout this paper, I use the term "text" to refer to an individual object and "composition" to refer to a loosely standardized and recognizable work, such as the literary composition known as Inana and Ebiġ or the lexical composition Diri. In my terminology, OB texts often represent extracts of particular compositions.

scribal curriculum contained two major phases.² The first involved copying lists of words and signs; the second entailed reproducing literary texts. By copying the lists of words and signs—the lexical lists—in the first phase of the curriculum, scribes were trained in writing cuneiform signs, Sumerian vocabulary, and other aspects of scribal culture. In the second phase, advanced scribes continued their training on their way to attaining a higher level of mastery in Sumerian language and literature.³

Delnero's (2012a, b) work has focused on this second phase of education—on literary texts—where he has convincingly argued that reproduction from memory was the principal method that scribes employed for transmitting Sumerian literature. Delnero's work, however, applies to literary reproduction. The means of transmitting lexical compositions involved a combination of visual copying, memorization, and ad hoc production.

Many portrayals of ancient or medieval scribal culture evoke images of meticulous scribes who attempted to replicate a master copy and reproduce a standardized composition. As M. Civil (2011: 229–230) has expressed for the lexical texts and for the Laws of Ur-Namma⁴ and Delnero (2012b) has demonstrated for the literary corpus, this characterization does not exist in the early second millennium. The concept of a composition is more fluid for OB scribes than in previous Assyriological contemplations, which tended to assume a

2 Major discussions on the OB curriculum include Veldhuis 1997, 2004, Tinney 1999, Robson 2001, and Delnero 2012b, all of which build on earlier work, especially by H.L.J. Vanstiphout (1978, 1979) and M. Civil (e.g., Civil 1975, 1978). Recent work has probed whether a curriculum even existed, examined the standardization of this curriculum, and questioned who participated in scribal education for what purpose(s) (Delnero 2010b; Kleinerman 2011; Gadotti and Kleinerman 2011, 2012; Michalowski 2012, 2013; Peterson 2015). Much of the discussion suggests a great deal of individuation among the schooling masters in OB Babylonia, particularly for the literary phase. The generalities of the stages of the lexical phase are fairly regular throughout OB Babylonia, although the details of particular compositions may vary from school to school, for example, the lack of the composition Tu-ta-ti at House F at Nippur (Robson 2001) and the absence of much of the advanced lexical stage at Ur-Utu's house at Sippar-Amnānum (Tanret 2002). See further Veldhuis 2014: 212–215.

3 Note P. Michalowski's (2012) contention that training in reading and writing Sumerian had more to do with cultural literacy for elites (akin to training in Classical languages for Oxbridge schoolboys in Victorian England) and little or nothing to do with professional competence, an argument in line with sociological work on academic capital (e.g., Bourdieu and Passeron 1979; Bourdieu 1988).

4 "The basic unstated assumption that the scribes intended always to reproduce as faithfully as possible an original is demonstrably incorrect" (Civil 2011: 229).

static, original text.⁵ For many lexical compositions, scribes seem to have taken liberties in reproduction, in effect regularly creating unique versions of well-known compositions.

Before detailing my reasoning for this suggestion, I first discuss this initial phase of scribal education in more detail. Lexical lists provide runs of words or signs without context. The lists, however, represented more than mere rote reproduction or memorization. Each stage of lexical education served a pedagogical purpose.⁶ The first phase may be further sub-divided into four distinct stages. In the first stage, scribes copied lists that allowed them to learn simple signs, the basics of syllabification, and standards for writing personal names. The second stage, composed of the lexical series *Ura*, introduced the scribe to the lists of Sumerian vocabulary, arranged mostly according to semantic sphere: objects made of stone, birds, soups, and so on.⁷ The third stage, *Advanced Lexical Education*, increased the scribe's familiarity with the system of signs, introduced him to mathematics and metrology, and taught him reasoning by analogy. The final stage incorporated model contracts and complex Sumerian proverbs, giving the scribe an initial glimpse of signs and words in context, further allowing the scribe to refine practices and techniques habituated during the earlier stages.

5 I refer here to the textual-critical methods of editing compositions (especially literary), which Assyriology has adopted following Medieval, Classical, and Biblical models of textual reconstruction. The basic goal, in such orientations, involves the "difficult and . . . important task of preparing critical editions aimed at retrieving, insofar as possible, the words of the original text," as stated explicitly by M. Powell (1978). For an extended recent critique of such methodology, with reference to Sumerian literature, see Delnero 2012b: 6–11.

6 It should be emphasized that recent studies on the curriculum and education are limited in their ability to fully comprehend the sociology of education enacted in ancient schools. The texts allow partial (and perhaps skewed) reconstructions, but such modern portraiture should not be confused for historical fact.

7 See the many discussions on various means of vertical arrangement in the lexical lists—including thematic/semantic, phonologic, graphic, or analogic: Edzard 2007 and Van De Mieroop 2015 move freely between various compositions from multiple periods and geographical locations; Wagenosner 2010 discusses the Early Dynastic lexical lists. Edzard 1982 deals primarily with OB *Nippur Ea*; Hilgert 2009 considers the version of OB *Diri* known from two Oxford prisms; Crisostomo 2014 focuses particularly on OB *Izi*, with brief discussions of other advanced lists.

TABLE 1 *Old Babylonian Curriculum*

Phase 1	
Stage 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basics of cuneiform <ul style="list-style-type: none"> sign exercises, syllabification, personal names
Stage 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction to Sumerian vocabulary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> thematic arrangement of Sumerian terms
Stage 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advanced Lexical Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> mathematics, advanced sign readings, further Sumerian vocabulary, analogical reasoning
Stage 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sumerian phrases <ul style="list-style-type: none"> model legal contracts, Sumerian proverbs, Contextual use of signs and vocabulary
Phase 2	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sumerian literary compositions⁸ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> hymns, narratives, literary letters

As discussed above, this phase of education did not rely as extensively on reproduction from memory as the later literary phase. Scribes learned lexical compositions first by copying a teacher's example.

Figure 1 demonstrates that a teacher wrote out an extract from the list Lu-azlag on the left column, which the student replicated to the right—a clear example of visual copying.⁹ The student did not copy the teacher stroke for stroke; he used the teacher's copy as a guide and wrote in his own style, resulting in obvious paleographic differences in certain signs. Often, the student would erase his copy and repeat the exercise, as illustrated in figure 2, an excerpt from the list Lu.

8 Tinney (1999) suggested a staged curriculum for the literary phase, consisting of a group of four hymns called the Tetrads, followed by a group of literary compositions called the Decad. This initial reconstruction has since been complicated by numerous studies that have demonstrated that the literary phase was more varied, both in order and which compositions students reproduced (see above note 2).

9 Even still, the third line of this particular exemplar includes variation between the teacher's copy and the student's copy: **lu₂ šag₄ ħul ak** = *na-an-zé-rum* (teacher's); **lu₂ šag₄ ħul-gig** = *na-aš-zé-rum* (student's). The difference between the signs **AK** (𒀭𒀪) and **GIG** (𒀭𒀪𒀭) is not insignificant, and it is difficult to imagine why the student deviated from the model; the student's **AŠ** (𒀭) may be an incomplete or ill-formed **AN** (𒀭).



FIGURE 1 CBS no67 (PBS 5, 145). Teacher's copy on left; student's copy on right.
PHOTO BY AUTHOR, COURTESY PENN MUSEUM.

On the reverse of such tablets, the student engaged in a different type of practice, reproducing from memory a section of a lexical composition he had learned previously—in figure 3, a metrological list of capacities. These teacher-student exercise tablets represent the majority of OB lexical exemplars at Nippur.¹⁰ This distribution is in contrast to the paucity of such exercise tablets used for reproducing literary tablets, a process for which scribes more often employed single column tablets with long extracts from compositions.¹¹

I also suggest that student scribes regularly crafted their own versions of lexical compositions. Some OB lexical lists are relatively standardized. Exemplars of the list of animals, for example, rarely exhibit variations; most exemplars are fairly predictable.¹² Advanced lexical compositions, such as the sign list Ea or the word list Izi, however, can differ dramatically on certain types of exemplars.

10 This distribution appears to be unique to Nippur. At other sites, small round tablets (lentils) are more prevalent. These lentils are small teacher-student exercises, often featuring one or two lines written by the teacher and copied by the student.

11 On which, see further Delnero 2010a.

12 OB Nippur Ura 3; see oracc.org/dcclt/Q000001.



FIGURE 2 *HS 1703 obv (TMH 8, 8), a teacher's excerpt of Lu; student's copy erased.*



FIGURE 3 *HS 1703 rev, with an excerpt from a metrological list.*
PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE
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HILPRECHT SAMMLUNG.

Multi-column tablets and prisms, which contain long extracts of these lists or even entire compositions, often exhibit extensive variations, such as the insertion, deletion, and rearranging of entries compared to other exemplars. In this sense, then, many multi-column tablets and prisms are distinctive versions, which are nevertheless recognizable as representing a particular composition.¹³ This fact is often obfuscated in standard composite editions, such as the *Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon* (*MSL*).¹⁴ These multi-column tablets and

13 For lexical texts, see the remarks in Veldhuis 2004: 89–92 and Veldhuis 2014: 155 with note 312. Note for literary prisms, Delnero's appraisal, "The quality of texts inscribed on prisms can be substantially inferior to the textual quality of the other types of sources with the same composition" (Delnero 2010a: 57), Cooper's discussion of the textual inferiority (based especially on "omissions and errors") of the prism CBS 7820+ and the multi-column tablets UM 55-21-301+ and Ni 4008+ (Cooper 1983: 46), and Klein's similar comments on prisms (Klein 1981: 170 with note 266).

14 The Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts (<http://oracc.org/dcclt>) aims to ameliorate this deficiency of *MSL* by including composite editions (of multiple versions) as well as individual exemplars (for an introduction to DCCLT, see Veldhuis 2014: 24–26), which are linked to their composites. Recent print publications of lexical material (Proust 2007, 2008; Civil 2010), as primarily publications of individual collections, have further demonstrated the necessity for treatment of individual exemplars. Future print editions of lexical texts

prisms may represent something like a student's final exam.¹⁵ If so, then student scribes could apparently adapt whatever techniques were embodied by a given list and demonstrate that he understood how the list worked by essentially creating the list anew. The compositional macrostructure would remain intact, but the details from entry to entry denote an individual scribe's handiwork.

Consider the opening section of the list Diri.¹⁶

	N 3997+	Ni 3844	A 30283	HS 1632
[di-ri] SI.A	<u>watrum</u>	<u>watrum</u>	<u>watrum</u>	<u>watrum</u>
	<u>šūturum</u>	<u>ašāšum</u>	<u>ašāšum</u>	<u>šūturum</u>
	<u>niqelpûm</u>	<u>neqelpûm</u>	<u>neqelpûm</u>	<u>niqelpûm</u>
	<u>ašāšum</u>	<u>eli</u>		<u>ašāšum</u>
	<u>eli</u>	<u>šūturum</u>	<u>naḥdurum</u>	<u>eli</u>
	<u>el-x</u>	<u>kāpidum?</u>	<u>kāpidum</u>	<u>el-x</u>
	<u>kāpi[dum]</u>	<u>izuzzum</u>	<u>naqārūm</u>	<u>kāpidum</u>
	<u>sāqīrum</u>	<u>naḥduru[m]</u>	<u>eli</u>	
	<u>wašû[m]</u>	<u>[nag]arruru[m]</u>	<u>alākum</u>	
	<u>izuzzum</u>		<u>qāpum</u>	
	<u>naḥdurum</u>		<u>nasāḥ[um]</u>	
	<u>nagarrurum</u>		<u>maḥāḥum</u>	
	<u>amum</u>			
	<u>ḥāmum</u>			
	<u>ḥašāšum</u>			
	<u>aš-šēr</u>			
	<u>ga'ûm</u>			

would do well to follow this trend. Indeed, two forthcoming volumes on lexical material in the Frau Hilprecht collection, by G. Spada on model contracts and legal phrasebooks and J. Crisostomo on all other lexical lists, provide such editions. The movement towards such editorial editions is not confined to lexical texts or even Assyriology, but reflects a broader trend for editing pre-modern compositions.

- 15 Delnero suggested similar for the literary curriculum with regard to the relationship between single column (Type III) tablets and multi-column tablets (Delnero 2010a). Delnero also proposed (asserting that it is “now generally assumed”) that literary prisms may have been votive offerings (Delnero 2013: 146; but note Veldhuis 1997: 31 who draws attention to the exercise character of prisms); the present idea of prisms as a final exam does not exclude the possibility that they also served as votive offerings.
- 16 *watrum* “greater”; *šūturum* “supreme”; *neqelpûm* “to float”; *ašāšum* “to be distressed”; *eli* “more than”; *kāpidum* “planner”; *sāqīrum* “someone who builds high”; *wašûm* “to go out”; *izuzzum* “to stand”; *alākum* “to walk”; *naḥdurum* “to become eclipsed”; *nagarrurum*

Diri is one of only two regularly bilingual lists used in the OB curriculum.¹⁷ The composition systemizes knowledge of compound signs—the combination of two or more signs whose reading is not evident from the individual parts.¹⁸ Each of these Akkadian translations references the sign combination SI.A (column two above), given the reading **diri** in the list (column one above).¹⁹ From the four exemplars attesting this initial section,²⁰ all from Nippur, we can observe the underscored common entries, with minor dissimilarities in ordering among the sources. The differences, in bold, demonstrate the extent of variation. The first few entries are essentially the same, with some discrepancies in order. After the initial entries, the exemplars disagree extensively.

These dissimilarities in Diri exemplars, however, may represent compositional differences only in the Akkadian translations. One could argue that the Sumerian represents the core of the composition, whereas the Akkadian translations, as secondary components, are particularly prone to variation. While such reasoning may explain why Diri exhibits greater variation than other curricular lexical compositions, others also show degrees of alteration amongst their exemplars. Copies of the unilingual Sumerian acrographic word list Kagal, for example, are easily identified, but are not so quickly placed within composite reconstructions due to disparity among exemplars.

For the sign list Ea, the most copied of the advanced lexical lists during the OB, *MSL* 14 differentiates 24 versions—two “standard” versions from Nippur (Ea and its bilingual counterpart Aa) and 22 “secondary branches”. To these may be added several others, published after *MSL* 14.²¹ Some of these different versions may be attributed to alternative traditions at different scribal centers (e.g., Sippar or Babylon); others were found at Nippur, where the majority of Ea exemplars have been found. Moreover, even within the “standard” Nippur version of Ea, variation exists among the exemplars.²² Consider four exemplars, all from Nippur, attesting the section with LAGAB as a container sign.²³

“to roll over”; *naqārum* “to demolish”; *qāpum* “to cave in”; *amum* “raft”; *hāmum* “raft”; *hašāšum* “to inflate”; *aš-šēr* “in addition to”; *ga’um* “to be superior”; *nasāhum* “to tear out”; *maḥāhum* “to cause (eyes) to swell”.

17 The other is Lu-azlag, on which, see below.

18 The edition is in *MSL* 15 (Civil 2004); see also Veldhuis 2014: 182–187.

19 The column is reconstructed here; it is not preserved in any OB sources from Nippur (see Civil 2004: 3).

20 I have collated those in Istanbul and Jena; the exemplars in Philadelphia are, however, currently unavailable. I was unable to collate the cast of 3N-T 631 (A 30283) in Chicago.

21 See Veldhuis 2014: 182 with notes 384–387.

22 See also Civil’s discussion of variation within Ea and the ensuing problems for the critical edition (Civil 1979: 9–17).

23 Each entry begins with the pronunciation gloss, followed by the sign under analysis.

CBS 15281+	HS 1693	HS 1838	Ni 3704
ḥa-ab LAGAB×U	ʿu ₂ ¹ -mu-ʿuḥ ₂ ¹ LAGAB×X	ʿsu ¹ -ug LAGAB×A	ʿdu ¹ -ul [LAGAB×U]
ub LAGAB×U	en-gur LAGAB×ḪAL	ʿgaz-x ¹ LAGAB×A	za-ar ʿLAGAB×SUM ¹
pu-u ₂ LAGAB×U	i LAGAB×ḪAL	bu-ni-ʿin ¹ LAGAB×A	bu-ru ʿLAGAB×SUM ¹
du-ul LAGAB×U	e-ʿsi ¹ -ir LAGAB×KUL	gu-ni-in LAGAB×A	šu-ʿrum LAGAB×GUD ¹
ḥu-mu-uḥ ₂ LAGAB×U.A	tu-ku LAGAB×EŠ	en-gur LAGAB×ḪAL	u ₂ -u ₈ ʿLAGAB×GUD&GUD ¹
i LAGAB×ḪAL	bu-u ₂ LAGAB×EŠ	i LAGAB×ḪAL	niġ ₂ -ni-im ʿLAGAB×UŠ ¹
en-gur LAGAB×ḪAL	šu-rum LAGAB×GUD	(i) ʿx ¹	na-ʿaġ ₂ -x LAGAB×ḪAL ¹
bu-ni-in? LAGAB×A	u ₂ -ʿu ₈ ¹ LAGAB×GUD&GUD	ʿe-sir ₂ ¹ LAGAB×[NUMUN]	ša-ʿx LAGAB×SIG ₇ ¹
gu-ni-in? LAGAB×A	za-ar LAGAB×SUM	ʿtu ¹ -ku LAGAB×EŠ	gi ₄ -gi ₄ -ir ʿLAGAB×BAD ¹
e-sir ₂ [LAGAB×NUMUN]	ni-mi-ʿen ¹ LAGAB×UŠ	bu-ʿu ₂ ¹ LAGAB×EŠ	ġa ₂ -ri-im [LAGAB×KU ₃]
tu-ku ʿLAGAB×EŠ ¹	ʿgi-gi ¹ -ir LAGAB×BAD	za-ʿar ¹ LAGAB×SUM	
bu-u ₂ ʿLAGAB×EŠ ¹	ġa ₂ -ri-im LAGAB×KU ₃	bu-ʿru ¹ LAGAB×SUM	
za-ar ʿLAGAB×SUM ¹	ša-ra LAGAB×SIG ₇	ʿšu ¹ -rum LAGAB×GUD	
bu-[x] ʿLAGAB×SUM ¹		ʿu ₂ -u ₈ ¹ LAGAB×GUD&GUD	
šu-rum ʿLAGAB×GUD ¹		[x]-ni-im LAGAB×A	
u ₂ -u ₈ LAGAB×GUD&GUD			
ni-ʿmi ¹ -en LAGAB×UŠ			
x-[x-x] LAGAB×ḪAL			

These exemplars characterize a wildly fluctuating section.²⁴ The extent to which variation occurs within a singular section in Ea is greater than the macro-ordering of the composition. The basic structure of the whole composition remains largely coherent among all exemplars—Ea always analyzes

24 See the discussion in *MSL* 14 (Civil 1979: 31–32).

the A sign and its derivatives first, followed by the KU sign, then the LAGAB sign—but the order of entries within these larger sections is susceptible to alteration.²⁵ The composition is still easily recognizable as Ea, and the sources clearly belong to the same textual tradition, but the individual scribe who copied each text constructed his own micro-version within the confines of the larger compositional structure.

The lexical phase of the Sumerian curriculum confirms one of the important assertions for the literary corpus that Delnero—and others before him—have made: OB scribes were not rigorously bound to replicating a received text. Variation was the norm. Although scribes did not stray such that a composition was unrecognizable, they enjoyed some degree of freedom to build their texts and formulate their copies in different and occasionally innovative ways.

3 Compositional Interdependence

In the standard reconstruction of the curriculum, student scribes learned and copied lexical compositions before they began work on literary compositions. The vocabulary in the lexical curriculum, the Sumerian words and signs that pupils learned in the first phase of their training, belongs to the register of literary Sumerian. In other words, students in OB schools were trained more for reading and writing literature than for everyday contracts and documents. It is no surprise, then, that the vocabulary of the lexical lists and the vocabulary of the literary corpus overlap or that many words are unique to these curricular texts.²⁶ A systematic exploration of the interdependence of the lexical and the literary has not yet been attempted, or, at least, published.²⁷ The present section offers a rudimentary examination of the vocabulary interaction between lexical and literary compositions.

I briefly discuss some of my own observations on the intertextuality apparent in a limited set of lexical and literary compositions. Based on examinations of the advanced lexical lists in comparison with a selection of literary compositions, I suggest that the lexical texts seem to draw from the vocabulary of the

25 On the structuring processes of the macro-sections, see Edzard (1982).

26 Izi contains nearly 200 lemmata (out of nearly 1,025 entries) found nowhere outside the lexical tradition. Another 400 exist only in Sumerian literary texts used in the schools.

27 Many micro-studies have been offered, often in connection to a particular composition (e.g., Veldhuis 1997: 126–29; Krebernik 2004; Löhnert 2009: 214–15). Note also the discussions in Johnson and Geller 2015: 31–36 and Johnson 2015.

literary texts, and, in something of a dialectic fashion, the literary texts draw on the vocabulary of the lexical texts. Within the broader concept of scribal education or a curriculum, I propose that students and scholars copying and creating these texts could draw on their knowledge of both lexical compositions and literary compositions to generate new versions. They could explicitly reference a lexical composition within their copy of a literary composition or they could draw vocabulary from a known literary composition in building the lists of signs and words. The fluidity of these compositions within the context of the field of scribal scholarship allows for such a dialectical text-building program.

My proposal, of course, raises some questions about what it means to build a text. Perhaps my remarks here will raise more questions than provide answers. Regardless, we may be able to better imagine the process of text-building in the OB period.

Correlation between lexical compositions and other parts of the curriculum has long been suspected. Civil (1987) has shown how some literary compositions employ a technique he called “enumeration”, where literary compositions include a “listing of the terms of a lexical set”. For example, in the Temple Hymns, four lines contain various water words:

nin-zu ^dnanše ud gal-la a-gi₆ urun_x(EN)-na

peš₁₀ a-ab-ba-ka tud-da-a

uh₂-pu₂ ab-ba-ka zu₂ bir₉-bir₉

[a] i-zi-ba e-ne dug₄-dug₄

Your lady Nanše, a powerful storm, a mighty wave

Born on the sea shore

Laughs in the standing waters of the sea

Frolics in the wavy waters

Each of the words underscored here occurs within a single section in the list Izi (I:360–388).²⁸ Both P. Michalowski (1998) and G. Rubio (2003) have further explored this literary device as an intertextual move connecting the lexical and the literary, with Michalowski especially demonstrating that some entries in the later lexical list Erimhuš served as a type of commentary on Inana C.²⁹

28 Line numbering follows the edition in Crisostomo 2014. The *editio princeps* is *MSL* 13 (Civil 1971). For a brief description of the list, consult Veldhuis 2014: 170–171; for an excellent introduction, see Civil 1971: 1–12; for an extensive study, see Crisostomo 2014.

29 The list Erimhuš existed only from the Middle Babylonian period (latter half of the second millennium) and later. Moreover, during the Middle Babylonian period, it is known almost exclusively outside of Babylonia and Assyria, at sites such as Ugarit and Hattuša.

Michalowski showed that a sequence of terms (**eme-sig** “falsity”, **a-ša-an-ga-ra** “deception”, **ka e₂-gal** “impudence”, **kur₂ dug₄-ga** “speaking hostilities”) found in Inana C 157 appear in the exact same order in Erimḫuš 1: 280–283. The present segment explores other possibilities of such compositional interdependence.

One issue that I am considering is the nature of intertextuality and dependence in the OB curriculum. In other words, what makes me say that a word that appears in a curricular lexical composition exists there because of a scribe's familiarity with a literary composition or vice versa? One major reason is the shared social environment in which OB curricular texts were produced. These compositions were copied by a select group of actors for the purpose of scribal education. Secondly, these compositions share a linguistic register. Finally, certain compositions demonstrate a quantifiable confluence of particular vocabulary. In the next few sections, I discuss instances in which a lexical list and a (group of) literary composition(s) share lemmata, especially rare words in three case studies: (1) the word list Izi and the so-called Enheduana corpus, (2) the sign list Ea and the Sumerian Proverb collections, and (3) the word list Lu-azlag and the Eduba texts and dialogues.³⁰ Each of these compositions was used in teaching Sumerian and cuneiform writing in the OB throughout Babylonia.³¹

3.1 *The Word List Izi and the Enheduana Corpus*

The 274-line hymn Inana C³²—one of four compositions ascribed to the En priestess Enheduana, along with Inana B, Inana and Ebiḫ, and the Temple Hymns—includes about 140 words or phrases that correspond to entries in Izi.³³ If each of these 140 words or phrases occurred only once in Inana C, then, on average, Inana C would include a co-reference with Izi on every other line.

To date, only one copy from Babylonia (Kassite Babylon) has been identified. On the characteristics and manuscripts, see further the edition in *MSL* 16 (Cavigneaux 1985) and Veldhuis 2014: 235–236. On the possibility of precursors to the Erimḫuš method of textual composition, which may draw on literary compositions and expand via analogy, see Veldhuis 2014: 175–177 and Crisostomo forthcoming.

- 30 The compositions were selected through my observations of confluence or previous discussion in the literature.
- 31 Although each of these compositions is attested at multiple sites, my comments here pertain especially to Nippur, from which the bulk of the textual data comes. I could detect little to no remarkable instances of locally focused correlation, perhaps reflecting the state of the data more than any historical possibilities.
- 32 Inana C, otherwise known by its incipit “Ininshagura”, is edited in Å. Sjöberg 1975. See also the English translation on *ETCSL* (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk), number 4.07.3.
- 33 Although these compositions are traditionally associated with Enheduana—high priestess of Nanna at Ur during the reign of Sargon of Akkad in the twenty-fourth century—no

This statistic, however, includes prevalent words. It also includes relatively rare, but not uncommon phrases, such as **kur un₃-na** “mountain peak”, a phrase which occurs about a dozen times in the entire Sumerian literary corpus. The number also counts literary hapaxes, such as **in-ĝar** “feces”, a word otherwise known only from Izi and the list of meat cuts (Foxvog 1989: 172).³⁴ Of these 140 words or phrases nearly forty percent of them are rare, occurring fewer than five times in all known Sumerian texts, both literary and administrative. Such percentages suggest a relatively high degree of correlation between Inana C and Izi.

Another composition traditionally ascribed to Enheduana, the Temple Hymns (TH),³⁵ includes 133 words or phrases that co-occur in Izi in its 545 or so lines. The correlation does not appear to be as frequent as in Inana C, but the TH also include repeated refrains. One such refrain is “DN has seated him/herself on your dais”, the phrase **barag-za dur₂ bi₂-in-ĝar**. This phrase occurs 41 times in the TH, a handful of times elsewhere in Sumerian literature, and in the lists Izi and Kagal. A fairly rare phrase found in both Izi and the TH, **u₂—sug₄** “to eat” occurs three times in the TH and only four other times in Sumerian literature.³⁶ Other rare words found in both Izi and the TH include **zag-ša₄** “rival”, **du₁₀-us₂ dili** “single track”, and **a₂-kar₂** “akar weapon”.

My point in enumerating vocabulary words and numbers is to focus on the high level of correlation between Izi and these two literary compositions, far exceeding the average. In contrast, Inana B co-references Izi only 49 times in 153 lines, and Inana and Ebiĥ does so 48 times in 185 lines. It is perhaps too much of a coincidence that so many rare words can be found in such limited distribution and in relatively close proximity. Some degree of dependence seems probable.

3.2 *The Sign List Ea and Sumerian Proverb Collections*

The sign list Ea was the most copied advanced lexical composition at OB Nippur with at least 275 exemplars.³⁷ The list taught student scribes about the

source predates the OB period. In short, there is no evidence confirming Enheduana's authorship of these compositions, despite the internal claims (see e.g., Black 2002).

34 Contra Attinger 1993: 567.

35 For the edition, see Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969 and ETCSL 4.80.1.

36 Lament over Nippur 205, 275; Enki and the World Order 204; Nuradad 339.

37 By contrast, OB Nippur Izi exists in fewer than 150 exemplars; OB Nippur Diri in fewer than 50. The primary edition of OB Nippur Ea, *MSL* 14 (Civil 1979; see also oracc.org/dcclt/Q000055), includes 272 sources (plus 20 sources for Aa = Bilingual Ea; oracc.org/dcclt/Q000056), but excludes those sources which did not give pronunciation glosses (Civil 1979: 17). An unsystematic survey of Ea tablets in the collection at Philadelphia

polyvalency of the cuneiform writing system, providing multiple readings for simple signs.

S. Tinney has suggested a strong graphic correlation between the sign list Ea and the most-copied Sumerian Proverbs (SP) collections, SP 1 and SP 2+6 (apud N. Veldhuis 2014: 209). As Veldhuis (2000; 2014: 209–212) elaborates, the SP reinforced in student scribes rare signs, sign values, and Sumerian vocabulary through serial repetition and usage in context. It is possible, then, that the SP collections were compiled, or perhaps even created, for such pedagogical purposes, drawing especially on the lexical lists.³⁸

Veldhuis (2014: 209–211) discusses the example of SP 2+6.58–82, which allowed students to concretize their knowledge of the “animal head” group of signs by giving the same sign with different values or graphically similar signs in close proximity. This same sign group, with its many variations and readings, is treated in Ea 563–583. Although not an extremely rare sign value, **ukur**₃ “poor” is similarly considered extensively in SP 2+6.15–34, a whole section devoted to this word which occurs in Ea and only a handful of literary compositions outside of the SP collections.

An especially rare sign reading is the sign **KA×LI**, read **ġili**₃ “neck”.³⁹ The word occurs in both Ea 327 and SP 2+6.47: **dub-sar šu nu-a nar ġili**₃ **nu-a** “A scribe without a hand, a singer without a throat”. To my knowledge, this sign with this reading occurs nowhere else in Sumerian literature. Such examples advance my contention that the correlation between Ea and the SP collections reflect possible text-building practices employed in OB schools.

suggests that these latter sources were numerous, equaling or even outnumbering those used in the edition. No such tablets were found at Jena (possibly due to Hilprecht’s practice of collecting only exemplary pieces) or at Istanbul (as I was granted access only to published pieces)—the number and distribution of unpublished Ea texts without pronunciation glosses at Istanbul and the National Museum of Iraq is unknown, but it is likely the ratio of texts without pronunciation glosses to those with is similar to the collection in Philadelphia.

38 B. Alster (Alster 2007: 2n4; Alster and Oshima 2006: 31–41) cautions against a solely pedagogically grounded reason for the SP. Alster (and Oshima) follows A. George (2003: 34–35) in recognizing the importance of proverbs in shaping something of a moral social perspective.

39 The sources for OB Ea vary regarding the pronunciation here. Three sources, the majority, give the reading **mi-li**; other sources give **ġa₂-li**, **me²-li**, **gi-li**, and **‘mi¹-ri**; Bilingual Ea offers the reading **mi-li-ib** for the related sign **KA×RU**. As a result, the exact reading for the word is debatable; Couto-Ferreira, following Civil, suggests that these readings reference the phonetic form /**ŋilip**/ (Couto-Ferreira 2009: 164–165). See also Civil 2007: 24 with note 104 for further discussion and suggested possible loans from Semitic.

3.3 *The Word List Lu-azlag and the Eduba Texts and Dialogues*

The bilingual word list Lu-azlag offers a variety of terms related to human beings, particularly descriptions or activities; nearly every entry begins with the sign LU₂, used either as part of the word/phrase or as a semantic classifier.⁴⁰ Lu-azlag includes a number of words that never occur in Sumerian literature. Others exist only rarely, discussed especially in notes by Civil within the edition in *MSL* 12 and in Böck 1999.⁴¹ Several of these rare lemmata are found in the Eduba texts and dialogues, a group of texts often using ribald expressions and insults to express one party's superiority over another's.⁴²

As Böck recognized, the following sequence of insults occurs in the same order in both the literary composition Eduba B ("A Scribe and his Perverse Son")⁴³ 149–150 and Lu-azlag Segment 5, 10–13: **lu₂ sikil-du₃-a is-ḥab₂-ba-am₃ na-ḡa₂-aḥ lu₂ mu₂-da** "insulting person, villain, moron, rabid person" (Böck 1999: 59; Veldhuis 2014: 164). Three of these same invectives appear at the beginning of three consecutive lines in the Dialogue between Two Scribes 113–115: **na-ḡa₂-aḥ me-en... lu₂ sikil-du₃-a me-en... is-ḥab... me-en** "You are a moron... you are an insult... you are a villain".⁴⁴ Also from a Dialogue between Two Scribes is the sequence **ze₂-za gu₃ de₂-de₂** "croaker, shouter" (line 120), two rare words which appear in the exact same sequence in Lu-azlag (Segment 2, 116–117).⁴⁵ As with Michalowski's observations regarding Inana C and Erimḥuš, the correlation with similar sequencing between literary compositions and a lexical composition supports a high degree of dependence.

40 For the edition, see *MSL* 12 (Civil 1969: 150–219), where these lists are labeled "OB Lu"; consult also the DCCLT versions (oracc.org/dcclt/Q000301; oracc.org/dcclt/Q000302). For a brief overview, see Veldhuis 2014: 162–166; see also Böck 1999 for a study of these lists.

41 Some Akkadian expressions used in Lu-azlag are found in a unique administrative text dealing with textile workers (Lackenbacher 1982). It is possible then that the Sumerian vocabulary in Lu-azlag similarly confers expressions used more in non-literary contexts.

42 See also Johnson and Geller 2015: 19–24. For further on the Eduba texts, see especially Volk 1996, 2000. On the dialogues, see Volk 2011–2012. I also note that the list Izi includes a number of rare words that occur only in the list and in the dialogues and Eduba texts, such as **da-gum** "weak; crushing" (Izi II:92; Winter and Summer 272; Two Scribes 78; Eduba D 216 see Crisostomo 2014: 424–425).

43 Edition in Sjöberg 1973.

44 Line numbering follows the edition in Johnson and Geller 2015.

45 See also Böck 1999: 58.

4 Reflecting on the Lexical and the Literary

Too little is known about the initial compilation or standardization of any of these curricular compositions. The present study raises two questions: (1) have the lexical compositions collected words from the literary compositions? (2) have the literary compositions used lexical lists in creating their narratives? I suggest that both scenarios may be at work. It is possible that these compositions merely reflect the shared limited vocabulary available to the students and teachers working on Sumerian compositions in the early second millennium. Could, however, as shown above, an enumeration of water words exist in the Temple Hymns without recourse to the list Izi or the sequence of insults in both Eduba B and Two Scribes so closely resemble Lu-azlag without knowledge of the list? Just as the later Erimḫuš partially relied on Inana C, it is almost certain that the OB lexical lists draw from the literary compositions; the examples collected above suggest that the literary also rely on the lexical. The shared social context of the lexical and the literary allows us to construct a text-building narrative in which teacher and student scribes move back and forth between the lexical and the literary, allowing each corpus to affect the other, in an interdependent and dialectical practice of building compositions. Since, as shown throughout this paper, at least some of these lexical and literary compositions are only loosely standardized, nothing prevents these scholarly scribes from regularly creating anew.

In the context of this interdisciplinary issue, I offer these possibilities and leave things somewhat open-ended with the intent that further reflection and comparison, in addition to more focused research in this particular case-study will elucidate text-building practices in OB Babylonia. There is much more work to be done, and my comments here should be regarded as an initial foray into the issues of text-building during the OB period. A more extensive and rigorous examination, perhaps aided by the quantifiable results of an application of text mining, could clarify and sharpen my suggestions.⁴⁶ Closer comparison between the literary and the lexical within the same archaeological archive may yield further fruitful possibilities, as have been suggested previously for bilingual texts found at No. 1 Broad Street at Ur (Wasserman and Gabbay 2005;

46 The cuneiform digital resources and data mining utilities currently available offer the rudimentary tools for calculating the distance between two compositions, such as Izi and Inana C. Further technical exploration is required, but the possibilities for the statistical analysis of multiple texts in this manner are numerous. The potential applications will be explored in a future article.

Civil 2009; Lauinger 2014). The continuation of dialogue stemming from the present paper and the others in this issue will only enhance the reconstruction of the innovations of scholarly text-building during the OB.

The OB curriculum itself represents an innovation, a new way of generating and collating knowledge (see Veldhuis 2014: 223–225). Given the fluid nature of this curriculum—where visual copying, memorization, and ad hoc innovation all play a role in text reproduction, where the study of cuneiform writing and Sumerian and scribal practices combined to create new cultural institutions, and where the lexical and the literary were in constant interaction—I think it reasonable that the student and scholar scribes acting in the OB schools experimented with various ways of text-building.

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